

• Our military affairs correspondent, Ray Cromley, says the Russians are using the Arabs' fighting in Yemen as an opportunity to test "poison gas" warfare chemicals. Page 25.

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Russians Use Yemen as Lab for 'Poison Gas'

By RAY CROMLEY

HERE is no longer doubt the Russians are using Yemen as a proving ground for some of their advanced "poison gas" warfare chemicals.

It will be recalled that both Moscow and Hitler's Nazis used Spain as a proving ground for weapons and tactics they later used full-scale in World War II.

The use of Russian man-killing chemicals in Yemen by Nasser's Egyptians so worried the Israelis that they made heavy purchases of gas masks at the start of the fighting with Egypt.

The Russian chemicals were supplied to Egypt in the form of thin-walled "bombs" which break open and spread their chemical agents over a wide area.

The Russian-sponsored experiments in Yemen seem to have been systematic. The Egyptians have not used the chemicals generally in the war. Nasser has been using these agents apparently only in certain areas. The attacks have been carefully selected. The techniques and the agents used have varied from attack to attack.

RUSSIAN BOMBERS

Russian-built Il-28s were used to carry the bombs over the Yemeni targets. There is reason to believe Russian technicians supervised the aerial attacks and the use of the chemical bombs. There is no evidence that Russians piloted the planes.

The chemicals being used are of several types. One is a particularly deadly nerve agent (commonly called a nerve gas) that kills quickly.

Analysis of the fabric found with the bomb splinters after one raid showed traces of organic phosphorous compounds (de-

noting the presence of killer nerve agents).

Laboratory examination showed these chemicals had reduced blood choline esterase in human beings and animals. (A major reduction of choline esterase makes it impossible for muscles to relax, causing death).

Different Russian chemical agents seem to have been tried out in attacks in different places. In some areas, according to Saudi Arabian medical reports, there were indications several Russian man-killer chemicals were used in combination.

MORE EFFECTIVE

The Russians in their literature have reported finding chemical or bacteriological agents used in combination are more effective as killers than when used singly.

The effectiveness of the Russian chemicals was demonstrated in the Jan. 5, 1967 raid on Kitaf, Yemen. The chemicals, which included nerve agents, were so effective that Yemeni who were "only lightly contaminated" were made "seriously ill." Those caught in the brunt of the chemical attack, of course, were killed outright. Many of the "lightly contaminated" reported will bear the effects the rest of their lives.

It is much more difficult to develop a deadly chemical agent effective in wartime situations than to develop one that kills effectively in the laboratory. The Russian experiments in Yemen indicate Moscow's scientists have developed combinations that work with deadly efficiency under battlefield conditions.

The question then arises: how good are U.S. defenses against these Russian chemical agents?